

Drinking, you and
your mates

NHS

Home Office

**HOW
MUCH IS
TOO
MUCH?**

ALCOHOL
KNOW YOUR
LIMITS

DID YOU KNOW?

Because of differences in biology, women can get drunk more quickly than men – and their daily limit is less.

DRINKING. EVERY UNIT COUNTS.

For many young people, drinking alcohol is a part of life. But how much do you know about how alcohol affects your body – both now and later on? How can you help reduce the risks to your personal safety when you drink? This leaflet will help you make choices about how much you drink. It tells you how alcohol can affect you, explains how you can stay safe when drinking and explains what to do if someone is in trouble after drinking too much. It's not about stopping drinking. It's more about making sure it plays a positive part in your day-to-day life.

DRINKING AND YOU

A few drinks at the weekend. You and your mates are out in town, having a laugh – anything could happen. That might be closer to the truth than you think. If you drink more than the recommended maximum regular daily amount, you can't be sure what the effects could be.

YOUR DRINKING CHOICES

Some people like to have a drink to relax at the start of an evening. Nobody's saying you should give that up. But regularly drinking more than the maximum recommended amount of daily units or rapidly drinking too much in one go both have their risks.

The NHS recommends that you should not regularly drink more than:

3-4 units of alcohol a day for men,

2-3 units of alcohol per day for women.

If you drink more than this, the risks to your health and personal safety start to increase – especially if you regularly drink large amounts over a short period of time. But who thinks in units? To give you some idea, a 25ml shot of vodka is one unit, and an alcopop is 1.4 units. But things do vary. Some beers are stronger than others, wine comes in different strengths and shots can vary considerably in size. See pages 18-19 for information on the unit content of different drinks and try the quiz on page 16 to check what kind of drinker you are.



MEN

Should not regularly drink more than
3-4 units a day



WOMEN

Should not regularly drink more than
2-3 units a day



PREGNANT WOMEN

Avoid alcohol altogether. Never more
than 1-2 units once or twice a week

YOUNG, FIT AND BEAUTIFUL?



Drink Saturday night. Sleep it off Sunday morning. If drink was having a bad effect on your health, you'd feel it, wouldn't you? Not necessarily. Heavy drinking affects you now and in the future. And you might not be able to tell right now what harm you're doing. But, you can reduce the risks by knowing how many units you're drinking and stopping when you reach your maximum daily limit.

KNOW THE SIGNS

When you're on a big night out, it's easy to forget that you might be putting a serious strain on your body. Any of these sound familiar?

- dizziness
- throwing up
- falling over
- headaches.

It takes your liver an hour to process one unit of alcohol. So if you're having two or three drinks an hour, you're overloading your system and your health could suffer.

DID YOU KNOW?

You can't save up your daily allowance and have it all in one go. If you do find you've overdone it, keep off the booze for 48 hours afterwards to give your body a chance to recover.

CHOICES LOOK AFTER YOURSELF:

- eat before you go out
 - drink water regularly and before you go to bed after a night out
 - alternate alcoholic drinks with soft drinks or water
 - don't try to keep up with friends who drink more than you
 - try to avoid buying drinks in rounds
 - if possible, sit down whilst you drink - you will drink less than you would standing up
 - use more mixers - diluting a drink with another mixer will make it last longer and lessen the effects
 - don't mix alcohol with drugs - especially ecstasy - it can be deadly
 - if you're on medication, ask your doctor if it's okay to drink.
-

The effects of alcohol build up in your body over time. So if you regularly drink more than the recommended daily amount, you could be setting yourself up for long-term health problems.

PROBLEMS YOU CAN'T SEE...

- stomach ulcers
- sexual difficulties and impotence
- certain types of cancer, especially breast cancer
- memory loss and brain damage,
- cirrhosis of the liver
- anxiety, stress, depression, poor concentration.

**Beer
pint**



2.3 UNITS

**Lager
pint**



2.3 UNITS

**Cider
pint**



3.4 UNITS

...AND PROBLEMS YOU CAN SEE

If the way you look is important to you, you might want to consider how alcohol affects your appearance. All alcohol is heavy with calories. So the more you drink, the more likely you are to put on weight and develop a beer belly. Heavy drinking can also take a toll on your looks, give you skin problems and age you before your time.

HOW'S YOUR DIET?

Having a kebab or a bag of chips after a few drinks is one thing, but you might be surprised at how many calories you get through just by drinking. For example, a small glass of wine has the same calories as a packet of crisps. A pint of cider contains the same calories as a large mince pie – something to think about at your next Christmas party!

Drink	Units	Calories	Food equivalent
White wine (175ml)	2.1	130	A bag of crisps
Red wine (175ml)	2.1	120	A slice of cheese & tomato pizza
Lager or beer (pint)	2.3	170	A small sausage roll
Cider (pint)	3.4	200	A mince pie
Vodka (25ml)	1.0	55	A serving of single cream
Alcopop (275ml)	1.4	200	A chicken drumstick

The recommended daily calorie intake for women is 2,000 and for men is 2,500.

DID YOU KNOW?

Regularly drinking more than three single vodkas a day (or four if you are a man) will push you over the recommended NHS limits for regular drinking. Although drinking more than three or four such drinks on a one-off session might leave you feeling happy and uninhibited, drinking to get drunk can be risky.

WHO'S LOOKING AFTER YOU?



Ever been so drunk that you're not sure how you got home? Or woken up the morning after and regretted making a fool of yourself? Maybe you can't remember what you did. No matter how good a time you're having when you're drinking, it's important to put the health and safety of you and your friends first. Plan ahead and keep within NHS recommended limits. That way, you've got more of a chance of controlling what happens to you on a night out.

WHAT ARE THEY LAUGHING AT?

The more you drink, the easier it is to cross the line between being funny and being annoying. You might think that you're the life and soul of the party, but can you be sure everybody's laughing with you and not at you?

AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

You might think you can control yourself, but you can't control how others behave when they're drunk. Young men are particularly vulnerable to violent attacks by other people who've been drinking.

DID YOU KNOW?

Around half of all violent crime is alcohol related.

DID YOU KNOW?

One in three reported rapes happens when the victim has been drinking.

SEX

That person you're pulling might look gorgeous after you've had a few drinks. But what about in the morning? And can you be sure you'll use a condom? Unprotected sex can lead to unintended pregnancies or sexually transmitted infections like chlamydia, gonorrhoea or HIV. Make sure you're both up for it – If you don't have a firm 'yes' it's legally rape and you could be charged. Women are most at risk from sexual assaults, either from strangers or guys they have met over the course of the evening.

MIXING ALCOHOL AND SEX

Don't be surprised if you can't perform after a heavy night drinking; alcohol acts as an anaesthetic and makes it harder to achieve an erection or orgasm. Over time, heavy drinking can lead to impotency, smaller genitals and a lower sperm count.

SPIKED DRINKS

Both women and men are at risk of their drinks being spiked by someone. Watch your drink being poured, keep your drink with you and watch out for your friends. Don't accept a drink from someone you don't know and trust or share or swap drinks. And if you suddenly feel odd or unusually drunk, ask someone you really trust to get you home safely. Remember, although you need to watch out for drugs, it's more likely someone will sneak vodka into your drink or buy you a double when you ask for a single.

TIP:
Ordinary lagers are almost
1 unit weaker than strong
lagers per pint.

INJURIES

If you're so drunk that you're dizzy or falling over, you could do yourself a serious injury. Pedestrians who are killed or injured in road accidents have often been drinking. So you shouldn't be surprised to learn that seventy per cent of A&E admissions between midnight and 5am are alcohol related.

THE DRUNKER YOU GET, THE MORE LIKELY YOU ARE TO PUT YOURSELF AT RISK.

LOSING YOUR STUFF AND GETTING ROBBED

Remember, after a few drinks you're more likely to lose things, particularly money and door keys which can prevent you getting home safely. Worse still, you're setting yourself up as easy prey for robbers. Women feel most in danger walking down the street, yet it's blokes who are more likely to get mugged.



Alcopop
bottle



1.4 UNITS

Spirits
measure



1.0 UNITS

Wine
175ml glass



2.1 UNITS

KEEPING YOU SAFE

- at the start of an evening, plan how you'll get home – keep enough money to pay for the journey home or agree who will drive and not drink
- don't accept drinks from strangers
- don't leave your drink unattended
- don't get into an unlicensed cab or in a stranger's car
- don't get into a car with a driver who's been drinking
- don't leave your friends to go off with someone you don't know
- avoid aggressive drinkers – walk away if someone seems to be getting too rowdy
- avoid walking home alone or through dark, unsafe areas
- if you think you're being followed, cross over the road to see if they follow – if you're still worried don't hang about, get to a public place and call a mate to meet you, or the police
- you won't hear someone come up behind you if you're chatting on your phone or listening to your personal stereo
- if you are attacked, your best bet is to shout and run
- when your instinct says there's trouble ahead, there probably is, so get somewhere safe
- carry a condom – if you have sex, make sure you don't take unnecessary risks.

KEEPING YOUR THINGS SAFE

- keep your belongings with you at all times
- don't leave things like your purse, wallet or keys lying around on the pub table
- keep bags closed, zipped up and buckled
- be extra careful with rucksacks – if someone grabs it, let it go
- don't flash cash around – keep it in your pocket
- if you use a cash machine, choose one that's well lit
- if you take your mobile out with you, keep it hidden and make any calls brief.

OVER THE LIMIT?



There are laws to stop people who are under 18 buying alcohol and to encourage responsible behaviour when you're drinking. So make sure that a night out with your mates doesn't end up with you getting into trouble with the police. Getting a fine or criminal record could also affect your career opportunities.

Bear in mind, too, that what you do when you're drunk doesn't just affect you. It affects the friends you're with, the people in the local area and the emergency services who might be called to deal with a situation you get involved in – when they could be helping someone else.

DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE

The advice for drinking and driving is simple – don't do it. Any amount of alcohol in your blood will affect your ability to drive. Even if you think you feel fine. It's much easier to have nothing to drink than to try to calculate how much is safe and risk being over the limit.

DID YOU KNOW?

Caffeine is a stimulant. Having a cup of coffee might make you feel more alert, but it does not make you sober.

TIP:

Have water between drinks – you'll be less dehydrated and less tired

The legal limit for driving is 80mg of alcohol in 100ml of blood. You can't translate that into a number of drinks easily – it depends on factors such as your weight and metabolism. So the best thing to do is not drink at all if you're driving.

DRIVING THE MORNING AFTER

It might not be safe to drive the morning after a big night out – alcohol stays in your system for a while. Lots of people have been prosecuted the morning after a drinking session.

WHO'S DRIVING?

If you go out with the same group of friends regularly, you can take it in turns to drive. Those of you who aren't driving could pay for soft drinks for the driver.

WHAT'S AGAINST THE LAW?

Nobody's saying you can't enjoy yourself. But you're much less likely to be a nuisance to other people if you don't go much over the NHS recommended limits for regular drinking. If you drink more, what starts off as a laugh could end up with a fine or a night in a police cell – or even a criminal charge.

If you are convicted of drink driving, you can face:

- a minimum 1 year driving ban
- a fine of up to £5000
- up to six months in prison.

You can get a £50 fixed penalty for:

- drinking in a pub, bar or restaurant if you're under 18, unless you are 16 or 17 and having a meal
- being drunk in the street
- drinking in a public place that's been designated a 'no alcohol' area.

You can get an £80 fixed penalty for:

- drunken behaviour in a public place
- harassing or distressing somebody while you're drunk
- buying or trying to buy alcohol, if you're under 18
- buying alcohol for other people who are under 18
- vomiting or urinating in the street.

In future, bar staff who serve you if you're under 18 or drunk might also get an £80 on the spot fine.

AVOIDING TROUBLE

If you're out on the town during the weekend and there's trouble, just stay well clear of it. You could get into a fight and finish up seriously injured or worse.

WHO'S PAYING?

Alcohol also makes you do things you normally wouldn't dream of doing – like vandalising or stealing someone else's property. The last thing you want after a good night out is to finish up with a heavy fine.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR ORDERS

If you cause harassment, alarm or distress to others you risk being made the subject of an anti-social behaviour order. Although it is a civil order, it is a firm measure to stop the behaviour that led to the order being made. This could involve you being banned from places you like to go to.

If you fail to keep to the conditions of the order, you will have committed a criminal offence and you could go to prison for up to five years. To enforce the order your details could be given to the local community for their protection so they can tell the police or local authority if the terms of the order are broken.

LEARN TO WALK AWAY

The best way to avoid trouble is:

- don't think you have to drink until you're drunk
- don't think you're invincible
- be aware that when drunk you may act more aggressively, which may affect how others behave towards you
- try to talk your way out of potentially violent situations and avoid saying or doing anything aggressive
- don't confront gangs – if you're in this situation get away as fast as you can.

DID YOU KNOW?

One in five violent crimes takes place in or around pubs and clubs; nearly 1-in-3 city-centre arrests involves alcohol.

WHEN DOES IT BECOME A PROBLEM?



You might be developing a problem if you're:

- drinking more often or in greater amounts
- not able to stop drinking once you've started
- drinking on your own or feeling guilty about drinking
- getting the shakes in the morning or smelling of drink during the day
- letting people down because of your drinking.

If you are having difficulties with drink and want to talk to somebody, see your GP or call Drinkline on **0800 917 82 82**.

DID YOU KNOW?

Half of all violent crimes, including one third of all domestic violence incidents, are linked to alcohol.

TIP:

Ordinary lagers are almost 1 unit weaker than strong lagers per pint.

EMERGENCIES

If a friend loses consciousness after drinking:

- call 999 and ask for an ambulance
- lie them on their side with their top leg bent towards their chest (recovery position)
- make sure they're breathing and their mouth and airways are clear
- if they stop breathing, do mouth-to-mouth resuscitation
- keep them warm (but not hot) with blankets or a coat.

If someone vomits you should:

- try to keep them sitting up
- lie them in the recovery position if they must lie down
- get help immediately if they begin to choke.

FIND OUT MORE

Want to know more about something in this leaflet? Or need more information on how you can drink without damaging your health?

Visit www.knowyourlimits.gov.uk

Beer
pint



2.3 UNITS

Lager
pint



2.3 UNITS

Cider
pint



3.4 UNITS

KNOWING YOUR LIMITS



HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH? TRY THIS QUIZ TO HELP YOU FIND OUT.

HOW OFTEN?

1 How often do you have an alcoholic drink?

Never	A
Monthly or less	B
Two to four times a month	C
Two to three times a week	D
Four or more times a week	E

HOW MUCH?

2 How many units of alcohol do you think it's healthy to drink in a typical day?

None	A
Up to three	B
Up to four	C
Eight or more	D
As many as you like	E

HOW MUCH DO YOU DRINK?

3 How many units of alcohol do you drink in a typical evening?

One or two	A
Three or four	B
Five or six	C
Seven, eight or nine	D
Ten or more	E

HOW OFTEN?

4 How often do you drink more than six units of alcohol in one evening?

Never	A
Less than monthly	B
Monthly	C
Weekly	D
Daily or almost daily	E

CAUSE FOR CONCERN?

5 Over the past six months, how many times have you been unable to stop drinking once you'd started?

Never	A
Less than monthly	B
Monthly	C
Weekly	D
Daily or almost daily	E

6 How often during the last six months have you missed work or not been able to do other things you were supposed to do because of drinking?

Never	A
Less than monthly	B
Monthly	C
Weekly	D
Daily or almost daily	E

7 How often during the last six months have you felt embarrassed, guilty or had regrets about what you might have done after a drinking session?

Never	A
Less than monthly	B
Monthly	C
Weekly	D
Daily or almost daily	E

8 How often during the last six months have you been aware of disturbing other people as a result of your drinking either through causing a mess (being sick, breaking things), waking people up or getting into fights and arguments on your way home?

Never	A
Less than monthly	B
Monthly	C
Weekly	D
Daily or almost daily	E

9 Have you or someone else been injured as a result of your drinking?

No	A
Yes, but not in the last six months	B
Yes, during the last six months	C

10 Has a relative, friend or doctor been concerned about your drinking or suggested you cut down?

No	A
Yes, but not in the last six months	B
Yes, during the last six months	C

HOW DID YOU SCORE?

MOSTLY 'A'S

You know your limits – to regularly drink no more than 2-3 units a day for women and 3-4 units for men – and you are sticking within them.

MOSTLY 'B'S

You may know your limits, but occasionally you're drinking more than you should and this could affect your long-term health. Think about why you drink and look at some of the tips to cut down in this leaflet.

MOSTLY 'C'S

You are drinking considerably more than is recommended and could be damaging your health and putting your safety at risk. Keep tabs on your drinking and consider visiting your GP. Ring Drinkline on **0800 917 82 82** for advice on how to cut down.

MOSTLY 'D' AND 'E'S

You are drinking way above what is recommended on a regular basis and are risking heart and liver disease and other problems as a result. Visit your GP for advice. Don't stop drinking totally before seeing your GP as this can cause serious side effects.

KNOW YOUR UNITS

The NHS recommends that:

- men should not regularly drink more than 3 – 4 units of alcohol a day
- women should not regularly drink more than 2 – 3 units of alcohol a day.

Women should avoid drinking if they are pregnant or trying to conceive. If they do choose to drink, to protect the baby, they should not drink more than 1 to 2 units of alcohol once or twice a week and should not get drunk

The table below provides information on the number of units contained in some common drinks, based on typical alcoholic strengths. Check labels or ask bar-staff to identify the actual ABV % strength of what you are drinking, because different brands may be stronger or weaker than these examples.

To keep track of the units in your favourite drinks visit www.drinkaware.co.uk. Then you can easily keep count and make informed choices when you're out drinking.

'Low Alcohol' drinks	Bottle (330ml)	Can (440ml)	Pint (568ml)	Litre
Beer, Lager & Cider at 2%	0.7 units	0.9 units	1.1 units	2 units
Beer, Lager & Cider	Bottle (330ml)	Can (440ml)	Pint (568ml)	Litre
4%	1.3 units	1.8 units	2.3 units	4 units
5%	1.7 units	2.2 units	2.8 units	5 units
6%	2 units	2.6 units	3.4 units	6 units
'Super-Strength' drinks	Bottle (330ml)	Can (440ml)	Pint (568ml)	Litre
Beer, Lager & Cider at 9%	3 units	4 units	5.1 units	9 units
Alcopops 5%	Bottle (275ml)			
	1.4 units			
Spirits (38-40%)	Small measure (25ml)	Large measure (35ml)	Small double measure (50ml)	Large double measure (70ml)
Gin, rum, vodka & whisky	1 unit	1.4 units	1.9 - 2 units	2.7 -2.8 units
Shots (38-40%)	Small measure (25ml)		Large measure (35ml)	
Tequila, Sambuca	1 unit		1.3 units	

Shots may either be spirits or liqueurs, and are generally drunk very quickly. Different liqueurs can vary considerably in strength – they can be stronger or weaker than this example.

Wine & champagne (red, white, rose or sparkling)	Small glass (125ml)	Standard glass (175ml)	Large glass (250ml)	Bottle (750ml)
10%	1.25 units	1.75 units	2.5 units	7.5 units
11%	1.4 units	1.9 units	2.8 units	8.3 units
12%	1.5 units	2.1 units	3 units	9 units
13%	1.6 units	2.3 units	3.3 units	9.8 units
14%	1.75 units	2.5 units	3.5 units	10.5 units

Fortified wine (17.5-20%)	Standard measure (50ml)
Sherry & Port	0.9 - 1 unit

Too much alcohol makes you feel
invincible when you're most vulnerable.

Home Office



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